



Statement prepared by:  
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*Oral Testimony:*

*www.regulations.gov*

*US House of Representative Committee on Energy and Commerce*

*Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change*

*Rayburn House Office Building*

*Washington, DC 20515*

*Thursday, June 30, 2022*

## **RE: NO TIME TO WASTE FOR AMERICAS BROKEN RECYCLING SYSTEM**

Chairman Tonko and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to speak. For the record, my name is Yvette Arellano, I am the founder and executive director of Fenceline Watch, environmental justice organization dedicated to the eradication of toxic multigenerational harm on fenceline communities. Communities that are next to oil, gas, and petrochemical industries. My statement is composed of two key issues the human health impact of plastic production and incineration.

### **I. IMPACTS OF PLASTIC ON HUMAN HEALTH**

Ninty-nine percent of plastic is derived from fossil fuels. Houston is home to the largest petrochemical complex in our country along a 52-mile stretch called the Houston Ship Channel. Chemical plants and refineries share stretches of land with elementary schools, playgrounds, churches, and homes. Houston also lacks zoning, there are no setbacks and no buffer zones. Our communities share experiences of smells, flares, and disasters with workers, many of which are contactors at these facilities. When a disaster hits they evacuate to our local park.

#### **a. CURRENT PLASTIC INDUSTRY**

Houston leads resin exports and holds 59% of market shares from all resins from the US.<sup>1</sup> From 2017-2018 Plastic resin out of Houston grew 38% and polyethylene

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<sup>1</sup> <https://porthouston.com/port-houston-expands-resin-packaging-capacity/>



exports increased 62%<sup>2</sup>. Currently the Houston Ship Channel is home to over 90 plastic facilities with 184 expansions and new plants coming our way.<sup>3</sup> The plastic industry currently makes up nearly a fourth of the industrial pollution in the Houston area.

#### **b. HEALTH IMPACTS**

Our lack of zoning disproportionately affects overburden communities of color and poor communities. We face daily threats of toxic exposure, potential disasters and irreversible health impacts. Four highly dense, dangerous pollutants, that come from plastic production plague the Manchester community. These include 1,3-butadiene, benzene, styrene, toluene, all three produce odors that range from sweet to gasoline-like.<sup>4</sup> Reporting these odors is an arduous task left to those of us can wait for over an hour bouncing between jurisdictions and departments. My predominantly Hispanic community is also limited English proficient. In our efforts we try to address language barriers for those who do not have ease of access with current reporting systems, or public input opportunities. **The Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act addresses these language barriers.**

Short-term exposures to toxics in the community include irritation of the eyes, nose, lungs and throat, headaches, fatigue, tremors, decreased blood pressure, memory loss, central nervous system damage.

Long-term exposures include effects on the nervous and reproductive systems, developmental problems, slowed reaction times, difficulty with balance, irregular menstrual periods, and leukemia.<sup>5</sup> Children in utero are affected before their first breath causing low-birth weights<sup>6</sup> (a significant factor in infant mortality).

With difficulty, I testify as one of many who suffer from irregular periods, sterility and skin lesions. **Break Free would temporarily pause new and expanding facilities and give agencies the time needed to investigate cumulative impacts, and ensure facilities integrate the latest technology to prevent further pollution.**

The University of Texas School of Public Health found that children living within two miles of the Houston Ship Channel had a 56% increased risk of contracting

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bizjournals.com/houston/news/2019/05/29/port-houston-sees-tonnage-growth-bolstered-by.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/dec/26/worlds-largest-plastics-plant-rings-alarm-bells-on-texas-coast>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ciel.org/plasticandhealth/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/air-toxics-and-health-manchester>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts28.pdf>



acute leukemia. Those living in areas with emissions of 1,3-butadiene (also generated in incineration<sup>7</sup>) have an increased risk of developing 3 forms of leukemia. Ann Coker a primary investigator for the UT study remarked that 1,3-Butadiene is strictly produced by 3 industries the primary one plastic.<sup>8</sup>

## II. THE GREENWASHING OF INCINERATION

Recycling schemes of chemical recycling and energy recovery do not qualify as recycling by international standards<sup>9</sup> because they rely on burning plastic.

EPA data on one pyrolysis plant, Agilyx reveals similar releases of toxic including Styrene, Benzene, and Toluene. People purchase goods, not the packaging they come in.<sup>10</sup> **Break Free includes extended producer responsibilities so that producers pay to build the infrastructure for a robust recycling system and minimum recycled content for beverage containers so that plastic products with recycled content have a fair shot compared to virgin plastic counterparts.**

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts28.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Whitworth, Kristina W et al. “Childhood lymphohematopoietic cancer incidence and hazardous air pollutants in southeast Texas, 1995-2004.” *Environmental health perspectives* vol. 116,11 (2008): 1576-80. doi:10.1289/ehp.11593

<sup>9</sup> European Union, “Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on Waste and Repealing Certain Directives,” Pub. L. No. Article 3(17), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008L0098> (accessed November 15, 2021). Ameripen, Packaging Materials Management Definitions: A Review of Varying Global Standards Guidance Document, 2018, <https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ameripen.org/resource/resmgr/pdfs/AMERIPEN-Report-RecyclingDef.pdf>. EPA, “Sustainable Materials Management: Non-Hazardous Materials and Waste Management Hierarchy,” September 11, 2015, <https://www.epa.gov/smm/sustainable-materials-management-non-hazardous-materials-and-waste-management-hierarchy>. EPA, “Definitions Utilized in the ReTRAC Connect™ State Measurement Template,”

[https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-09/documents/smp\\_definitions.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-09/documents/smp_definitions.pdf) (accessed December 15, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/chemical-recycling-greenwashing-incineration-ib.pdf>



## 37 people injured from explosion at Exxon Mobil plant in Baytown; shelter-in-place lifted

Jay R. Jordan, Michelle Iracheta, Chron

July 31, 2019 | Updated: July 31, 2019 4:29 p.m.



Houston Chronicle " evacuated workers from Baytown Olefins Plant July 31, 2019

The externalized cost on communities is unaccounted for and often ignored, with the most vulnerable left to shoulder the industry's human health and environmental costs for generations. We support Break Free and hope you will lead us in protecting communities and turning off the tap to the global plastic crisis.

Yvette Arellano

*Pronouns: They/Them*

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" <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Black-smoke-seen-rising-from-Exxon-plant-in-14270030.php>